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THE PRESENT DUTY, BY PAUL DESJAR-
DINS: TRANSLATED FROM THE
FRENCH BY E. N.

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THE PRESENT DUTY.

There are many people who can sometimes forget their own troubles, however great these may be, in remembering the moral distress of the world and in meditating a possible remedy for universal suffering. There are some who can remain calm before the spectacle, resigning themselves to a condition of hopeless evil and inextricable doubt. Others—and such is he who now speaks to you—are more aggressive, because they are more susceptible, or perhaps more deeply wounded; they know neither how to forget nor how to be patient nor how to despair; they are less concerned with what *is* than with what *ought to be*. Nay, they deliberately turn to what ought to be as the salvation for which the hearts of men are crying. It is their weakness to be unable to interest themselves for long in anything which does not wear the aspect of duty. They do not claim that it is a mark of strength to be unable to look with an untroubled eye on physical or spiritual disease, or to desire to busy themselves, even if vainly, at the bedside of the dying, and to still the anguish of their own hearts by devising remedies, even at the supreme moment, in the chamber of death. But it is from this inability to remain inactive in the presence of misery that these lines have sprung; and the same reason explains why I cannot feel myself exempt from sending them into the world, believing that they may be of use.

I.

We are living in a state of warfare. To be silent concerning our deepest beliefs, when they are disputed and attacked, is to be a coward. Nor must we be lulled into false peace by a seeming truce which invites us to yield our intelligence with facile compliance to ideas the opposite of our convictions. On the

contrary, we must draw our ranks closer and form in order. Between us and many of our contemporaries there is to-day an irreconcilable difference, a quarrel in which we are obliged to take up arms.

This is the situation, as I conceive it :

Subservience to the animal instincts, egotism, falsity—are these really evils, or only “inelegancies”?—things, that is, discredited for the moment, but which, gracefully and skillfully ordered, may yet wear a smiling front and satisfy the soul? Since there is nothing to convince us that the one is higher than the other, do these afford us a standard of living equivalent to that of saints and sages? Are justice and love the supreme law and the saving reality, or are they possibly illusions and probably in vain? Have we a destiny, an ideal, a duty, or are we aimlessly and causelessly spun through time for the amusement of some malicious demiurge, or by the caprices of the great god Pan? Here are the questions which divide consciences.

A great contention, truly—greater than that concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ, for example, or the existence of a personal God, or any other speculative theory. More urgent, also, since it entails consequences which affect me, bound as I am to existence from the hour when my eyes open to the light to that other when they shall close upon it. For according to the answer I make my soul upon these points, will my little garden-plot of time be sown and reaped.

After reflection and experience, I have answered them for myself. I avow my profound conviction that humanity has a destiny, that we are not here for nothing, that we are living for an end. But what do we mean by this word humanity? I cannot define it, but I know that humanity does not yet exist—that it is on the way to existence—and that in this, I, who do exist, am deeply concerned. What are we to understand by destiny? This is not much clearer; it is hardly more than a dream as yet—a dream born of a deep, incommunicable love to which only an equal love can respond; my heart is not pure enough to have conceived a certainty. But I affirm that this destiny of humanity, if it were known, would be such that all men, gentle and simple, would have a part in it, and that it must be achieved by the sole instrument at all men's disposal—by *good-will*. To know this is somewhat; to discern, if only by glimpses,

the direction whence the light cometh, and to struggle toward it. It is as if one were toiling through a gloomy, tangled forest toward a radiant point which cannot be wholly hid, however the importunities of our complex and pressing life may obscure it. The way to approach it is not to reason on the probable nature of the light, but to press forward ; in other words, to strengthen in myself and in all my fellows a *good will*.

There are plenty of young people journeying this same way, who would be sincerely glad to share this faith of which I speak. But they hesitate ; their education, wholly classic, still inclines them ceaselessly in other directions—toward a generalized empiricism called science, or toward the "grand style" and literary dilettanteism. They cannot make up their minds to cast aside this artificial education, as I have been compelled to do, forced to it by the needs of the present time. On the other hand, the Christianity lurking in their very marrow works unconsciously within them. They turn doubtfully toward us, but halt midway.

And there are, besides, contemporaries of ours who believe precisely the contrary of this. They do not believe that man has a destiny, or that there is for him a duty or a goal.

Thus, we have on the one side allies irresolute or lukewarm ; on the other open adversaries, with a conflict forced upon us. Day by day this conflict becomes more evident. It is what, in a recent book,* M. Edouard Rod calls "the antagonism between negatives and positives ; between those who tend to destroy and those who tend to construct." You may choose other terms ; the idea is perfectly clear.

Here, for example, is what Renan says : "We may place our whole greatness in this obstinate affirmation (of duty) even against the evidence for it ; we shall do well to do so. *But there are almost as many chances against its truth as for it.*" It is by such words, dropped lightly here and there, that this exquisite dreamer, if he be taken seriously (and even more if he be not so taken), brings into suspicion, and finally into discredit, a belief which one may hold or not, but which is certainly our only guide for living like rational beings. Here is no question, be it understood, of mistaking one or another particular obligation ; that point I yield at once, having always

* "Les Idées Morales."

felt that our moral judgments as well as our actions ought to be endlessly revised and corrected, following a progression without term. It involves much more than this—to wit, an acknowledgment of duty *per se*. Certainly, M. Renan nowhere explicitly denies the moral conscience, but he does continually deny that it can be indubitably proclaimed, which, after all, is the same conclusion. The right thing, in short, is the thing we are bound to do. Like Christ, who, according to St. Paul, is not “the yes and the no,” but the “yes,” duty is the “yes.” To allow the smallest possibility of a “no” would be to destroy duty. In his most recent attitude, M. Renan may be fairly called a “negative.”

Now let us listen to Count Tolstoï: “The life of man is a striving toward good; that toward which he strives is given him; life cannot be death, good cannot be evil.” By such expressions, which he repeats, restates, reaffirms, emphasizes, the rude apostle strengthens in us our vacillating belief in the existence of a law of life. He may be called a “positive.”

The men of our time may all be divided into “negatives” and “positives” as they incline toward one or the other of these attitudes. And to one or the other they must incline. Is our life in vain? This question forces itself on every one who opens his lips to speak or moves his hand to act; nay, on every being who draws a conscious breath. I agree that there are many who never speak of it, who never think of it, whose life speaks for them, and with no uncertain voice.

I confess that at first sight it seems as if the “negatives” were for the moment in the majority. They form part of many groups of men which I will not enumerate in detail. Among them must be included charming visionaries like M. Renan and his disciples; melancholy doubters like those to whom M. Leconte de Lisle lends the void of his sounding cymbals; all those whose shibboleth is the commonplace “empty illusions” and “puppets;” logical skeptics like Edouard Scherer (rare enough, these); empiricists or physicists absorbed in the play of blind forces; Darwin once; Biard to-day, with other followers of Darwin, among the *savants*; Taine, among the theorists; Zola, among the artists; with the innumerable echoes of these voices whose mingled sound drowns our own. Last, let me mention the rank and file of this host, for whom the law of

man's fulfillment of right is a mere chimera, since their whole life is its negation. I mean the multitude whose existence is aimless—who are good-tempered, easy-going, scrupulous not to offend perhaps, by temperament, by love of approbation or by indolence, but who live in a complete moral anæsthesia. Unquestionably this yielding human clay furnishes but weak allies to the illustrious artists, *savants*, thinkers, of whom I have spoken, but allies they are nevertheless. I acknowledge that they are not at the same point of development. They cannot express themselves with the same consummate elegance, they transpose but grossly the *Gaudeamus* of the leaders; but the difference is one of esthetics, not of morals. Their most eminent thinkers have no serious argument to constrain these quasi-animals to a different order of life. On the contrary, have they not legitimized instinct, nature's conquest of undisciplined man? M. Renan himself repeats more than once: "After all, are not the children of nature (*les naïfs*) in the right?" We must confess the solidarity of all these, and count them together as "negatives."

And now for the "positives." They include, first, all Christians and all Jews truly imbued with the spirit of their religions; then all philosophers and poets who affirm or sing a moral ideal; new disciples of Plato, of the Stoics, of Kant—such as M. Charles Secrétan, M. Renouvier; such also as M. Lachelier, M. Fouillée, M. Sully-Prudhomme. Closely allied with these belong those whose life itself, all theory aside, is an affirmation of the possibility and the sufficiency of goodness. The conduct of these men and women, thus in act of creating themselves as free creatures, as human beings, has the force of a doctrine. Each labors in his own place, striving by his own right-doing to realize the absolute righteousness in which he believes; devoted ministers of something outside of themselves, whether it be city, religion, charity, justice, truth or beauty conceived as a mode of worship. Whether they are soldiers or explorers who flock to Africa to immolate themselves in ever-greater numbers, whether they are teachers organizing their work in the interests of social peace or national elevation, or whether they are without function and without name, humble enthusiasts devoting themselves to an obscure life of sacrifice, their deeds speak for them. "This must be done," they seem to

cry out, "and this! There is no doubt that this work is set for us to do." These form, it seems to me, one single church having the poets and thinkers for elders, the heroes of duty for the flock. We may call them by a general name, the "positives."

Now, many believe that during the last decade in France the "positives" have been increasing and the "negatives" decreasing in numbers. There is much competent testimony to this belief, and to-day it is in the ascendant. I should like to show clearly the signs of change, and why they are to be trusted. This is the first of the two points I propose to touch.

But whether the cause of the "positives" be recognized as the stronger or the weaker, whether the future has failure or success in store for it, we have made it our own. Not for the sake of success but of truth have we embraced it. We, then, who stand for an aim in life and in humanity, are free to speak with no uncertain voice at this moment, for we need to make our position clear to our allies, conscious and unconscious, to our opponents, perhaps also to ourselves. This will be my second point.

II.

To define the moral ideals prevalent to-day does not involve a history of the manners of our time. The question, "How do we live?" if we are inquiring about states of conscience, would bring a misleading answer; since we are better than our lives. It would be hard to be judged by the poor reality of our accomplishment rather than by our effort; it would, moreover, be unjust. Not every action of my day bears witness to my personal idea of duty, but only those which meet my own approval, satisfy my own craving—those, perhaps, which are not enough to fill the hollow of my hand.

Generally speaking, we do approve but little of our own conduct, and we are not our own ideals. Therefore it is not necessary under pretext of enumerating our ideas of morality to describe our own departure from them. I content myself by briefly recalling them, lest it be said that, turned obstinately toward the longed-for dawn, we have not courage to face the night.

Assuredly, to the onlooker, the "negatives" seem to carry the day without hope of reversal: a taste for duty seems de-

cidedly of the past. Turn our eyes where we may, all surroundings seem vitiated. Even among the children at play in our streets there are many blotched and sickly little faces, many rickety little frames, which attest the degeneration of their parents. At every corner are sold the libertine productions which enable some wretches to live by the degradation of those more wretched still. If one would know what flame of vice burns in our midst, let him but observe how the eyes of men, even of old men, dwell on the women who pass. What bestial glances have we not intercepted under the fevered glare of the electric lights! what strainings, what convulsions of desire! what madness of pleasure or of gold!

Here is abundant material for tragedy, truly, but for the base tragedies of Balzac, not for such as are played by heroes under the open sky. An occasional pistol-shot, a case of poisoning, another of drowning—these are the only manifest signs of the misery within. The rest is stifled tears, brooding hatred, tolerated shame.

In such a distracted state of things conscience, even among good men, loses its clear ring. "What you are laughing at is an ignominy," I said to my friend. He was indignant at first; on reflection he agreed with me. He had not seen it. The vision of honest men is troubled by an encompassing corruption; and this is as it should be, for we are truly one body, whose members are distinguished from one another by more or less cleanliness, education, refinement, but not by principles. From top to bottom society at present lives by sensation: that is its common trait, and it divides according to the quality of its sensations. For its grossest members, the gratification of drink or the sensual enjoyments which to-day are called love; for over-stimulated and enfeebled organisms, the intoxication of the gaming-table or of morphine; for the refined and cultivated classes, sounds, perfumes, delicate colors, beautiful furniture, well-chosen words, new metaphors, strange foreign aspects; finally, for the highest in the scale, it is the intellectual relish, the skillful manipulation of the idea—it is a new mysticism, an ecstasy full of pride. These latter are by comparison great, the *noblesse* of the whole. But at the bottom it is only sensation playing on nerves unequally sensitive. Now, there are no two terms more inconvertible than

the Pursuit of Sensation and Moral Obligation—no two more diametrically opposite. He who depends wholly upon sensation, depends wholly upon the fortuitous and transitory things of life ; he is no longer a fixed center, a responsible being. His personality dissolves, evaporates ; he is incapable of reaction, and nature claims him as a lifeless thing.

It is true that this failure to react may pass for tolerance, for an easy good-humor ; although in fact the nerve of well-doing is relaxed with that of ill-doing. This good-nature is common enough, while the three virile virtues, Mastery of Self, Purity, Justice, are becoming rare, and we prize them as something foreign to us. To stimulate the passive element only, to make it a mark of aristocracy and an ideal, is to develop inversely to ourselves, inversely to humanity. Yet this is what we are doing.

I recognize the evil, I see it to its full extent, and still, let me repeat, this lamentable picture is not the true representation of our moral ideas. Our moral ideas are those which we hold concerning a life which would be the best for us, a life which is now exactly ours.

Since Ovid's Medea uttered her famous cry, many a one in turn has echoed it ; we see and we approve, alas ! the better ; the worse we still pursue. One of the most vital consciences of our day, Mme. Darmesteter, has said : " The great things which I love I cannot do ; the small things which I do I cannot love." The noble Channing wrote in a letter that the only great sorrow of his life had been the immense discrepancy between his conception and his practice of right. Truly, Channing would suffer from this more than most of us because holiness seems further away the nearer we approach it. But there are few of us who have not felt some sense of distance. Read the romances of Paul Bourget, charming and ambiguous as they are ; look at any of the works of art produced with infinite pangs and effort in the midst of this vitiated atmosphere. If we would judge of the distance between our moral ideas and ourselves, we can measure it exactly by the extent of our pain, which is our discontent with ourselves carried to the verge of despair.

Deep and wide-spreading is this pain to-day ; wherever vice abounds, sadness abounds also. It is no longer the melancholy

born of recognizing the insufficiency of the external, which Obermann experienced, but a bitterness mingled with contempt and distrust, born of recognizing our own insufficiency. Never, it seems to me, has the world been so generally *triste* as now. And this it is which saves us ; here I find our greatness. Only he is without hope who is at ease in doing evil ; the untroubled conscience is the only one in danger. Let us take heart, then, for it cannot be denied that we are far from at peace. Evidently we are in travail with something that shall work our cure. The symptoms of this painful labor are not lacking. The works of art which appear at present, however distinguished as to their form, yet indefinite and uncertain in underlying principle, are like the restlessness out of which they have grown ; very soon they cease to be even superficially pleasing. In poetry, in fiction, in music and in painting, there are exquisite productions, sprung not from power directed by love, but from a dream of power, a dream of love, in a sad exile from them both.

We have lost our relations to things ; when one of the old misfortunes comes upon us—death, abandonment or loss—we cannot face it as our ancestors did. The tranquillity of sorrow is not known, but at an unlooked-for blow the rending of our hearts shows that they have been weakened beforehand. We are divided within when we should be at one with ourselves. But unity within is possible only to the debauchee or the sage ; no middle ground is tenable. It is half-virtue that torments us, and it is necessary for our freedom from this torment that one of the two warring portions shall be routed. Suppose we choose the freedom of the debauchee. But how shall we enjoy it when so many things importune us to return to virtue—the books we have read, the things we have seen, the heroism of our fathers ? If we turn our eyes from their beloved images, our arms still stretch out to them involuntarily. Can we rid ourselves of the remembrance that Marcus Aurelius, Sir Thomas More, Vincent de Paul, have lived and that we have loved them ? Forever they embitter our false joys. There remains, then, the other inward unity—that of the sage, that which allows us to remember everything and to adjust everything to its own place. Alas, how difficult !

This is our malady—that we feel ourselves lesser men than

the men of sixty years ago. Humanity is suffering from an arrested development. It is seeking strength, against itself if need be, which will allow it to pursue those aims, misconceived but not lost from sight, which continue to call to it with the significant urgency of pain. This strength, which shall restore it to unity, humanity seeks, in the name of pity, everywhere. Wearied, it pauses, or turns now right, now left, smiting the barren rock and imploring the living spring.

To know ourselves, then, let us not consult those observers of our shame alone—Zola, the brothers Goncourt, M. Becque, M. de Maupassant, M. Huysman; let us not weigh our deeds only, to determine the state of our conscience, for with the evil that we do, the evil that we suffer must be put in the balance—the implacable sadness of failure and exile of which I have spoken. Thus we shall see that our moral ideal, though forgotten, has not perished. But does this mean that it has survived in our brains as pure theory, our lives being governed by quite another plan? Have we but elaborated in ourselves an intellectual conception of duty independent of our practice, as we accept scientific theories of the rotation of the earth or the circulation of the blood? Far from it. That would be another error which I must seek to remove.

Moral ideas are above all things practical; they are the program of an actual task. Their fulfillment is to be put in practice; and to achieve fulfillment they must lay hold upon the emotions and the will. No logical sequence of formulas is enough to bear witness to the morality of an epoch; were it so, all ages would be alike in significance and value, for formulated morality is the same throughout human history. No modern race has defended theft or adultery or lying; we are still under the rule of the decalogue, complicated, to be sure, by much legal casuistry. But the ancient vetoes still keep their power. What does change, with changing humanity from one age to another, is the energy with which we proclaim them, the sacrifices we are willing to make for them. Energy—this is not easy to compute, yet the only thing that really should be taken into account. Moral ideas are, above all, forces, or, rather, they are one sole force, the organic force of the soul, as in the acorn there is an organic force which impels it to become an oak. We must measure the intensity of this force in the men of to-day.

Whatever we choose to call it—spark, breath, or soul—this force which impels us to fashion ourselves after our ideal deserves study rather than any formulas. To take an example, it is clear that in antiquity the great dispute between the Stoics and the Epicureans (pretty nearly the dispute of to-day) concerned a spiritual difference between them ; in the detail of formulas it would be easy to present every Stoic maxim side by side with a corresponding maxim of the Epicureans. So, in comparing Christianity with Stoicism and other ancient systems, Ernest Havet, a sincere and eloquent man, has shown innumerable similarities between the Christian text and that of the philosophers. But had he succeeded in deducing all Christianity, trait by trait, from Plato and the Orphic mysteries, he yet could not have bridged over the immense spiritual difference between them—a difference perceptible by I know not what deep-hidden but certain sense to every one. Finally, in our own day, I suppose that from Leo Tolstoi and from the great Darwin one would obtain exactly identical precepts of virtue, although the spiritual difference between them is to the point of mutual exclusion. In this great “nothing” which I call soul consists the true mark of selection. “Il faut avoir une âme,” says old Akim in “The Powers of Darkness”—“it is necessary to possess a soul.”

What this soul is we know, each one of us. The humblest has felt, at certain moments, superior to himself—to his painfully discarded animal self ; has felt himself, as it were, in love with sacrifice—that is to say, in a new freedom. Who does not recall the efforts made in childhood to confess a fault graver than ordinary, and the joy of the liberated conscience afterward ; the delight of scampering about the garden in an ecstasy too pure to spend itself in material activity ; the vision of a future supremely bright not merely for one's self, but for all the world near and afar linked in brotherhood ; the forgetfulness of time, of all incompleteness, to such a point that it seemed as if one must fly away to Paradise at that luminous hour when the foliage kindles in the last rays of sunset ? And then on the morrow life began again—dull, colorless, full of discontent as before. Later on, in times of renunciation, we have known exalted moments, when we have felt ourselves suddenly incapable of evil and freed from its power. On the other hand, there are

days of irreproachable barren virtue ; we may have followed the severest counsels of morality without an upward-leaping heart. To abstain from evil is not to be delivered from it : he alone is wholly "saved" whom heroism constantly inspires and in whom love never sleeps. The spiritual life is always a mystery, and I cannot put into words what each one of us has felt. I do not know how there unfolds within us that sublime state known and variously described by Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Tauler, the author of the "Imitation," Shelley, Emerson, Leo Tolstoi—by all profoundly-feeling men. The theological hypothesis of "grace" is not so groundless as it seems ; but I know that this state *which is within the experience of every one* is alone deserving of the name of positive morality. He who is not all love may be indeed a good man, but he is not essentially and intrinsically moral.

Now, history shows us that what is true of individuals is equally true of nations. They pass through moments of great energy, when there is, so to speak, an afflux of soul. They feel themselves thrilled by joy, and run about their garden, the world, filled with a force which they cannot explain and which refuses to spend itself in low activities. Their moral ideas are formulated as they were yesterday, as they will be to-morrow ; only the spirit, the vital air, is not the same.

To take one or two examples from our own history, I may mention the great twelfth and thirteenth centuries, full of noble characters. It was the era of two crusades : a people's lofty victory, not so much over the Saracens as over natural egotism ; a marvellous incursion of poetry into the domain of fact. It seemed, says Ruteboeuf, as if God himself came to seek his own ; the Crusaders set out on their way with a high disdain of all personal interests, eager to die rather than to return ; *erat desiderium mori priusquam ad propria reverterentur*. At the same time, with cost and toil which they wished to make excessive, they began inconceivable cathedrals, basilicas sculptured to the very roof-tree by unknown artists, for God alone. Unknown, too, the authorship of those grand epics which excited less notice then than the merest feuilleton to-day ; which contained nothing base except to hold it up to scorn, and which mingled inextricably the heroic and the actual. Poetry, which

is in fact heroism transposed to another key, responded so well to this force of men's souls that it sprang up spontaneously. Think of the story of Guillaume le Maréchal, who felt on his deathbed a desire to sing, when, being himself no longer able to raise his voice, he bade his two daughters to do so, to prepare and attune his soul to flight. Grand epoch! to which I will only add the short episode of Jeanne d'Arc in the fifteenth century, and the beginning of this one, including the years from 1792 to the supreme cry of Lamartine, "I die because I cannot name what I adore."

The impulse is the same throughout: the great romantics have in them the stuff of the great conquerors, and the soldiers of our armies, as Ségur and Marbot have painted them for us, with their gift of joyously escaping from a hard present by the power of imagination, are true romantics. These were—I might name more than these—the great moments of France, when she counted for much, when she had more than virtue, more than morality—a soul.

Dare we look for such moments to reappear? I believe so.

You shrug your shoulders. How can we believe that the society which I described just now, given over to debasing pleasures, can find within itself the elements of safety? It is true that there are the lower classes, "the people," as they are called, who live by daily labor, and who form a great reserve. In fact, I do place my hopes upon them; yet how shall we know what they really are? For already the middle class, before disappearing, has tainted the future of these with its unclean hand—by speculation put within the reach of small means, by racing and gambling, by libertine publications distributed at the doors of every workshop, by hateful demagogism, by its ridicule of every sacred or serious thing. What can we look for from "the people"?

Yet I am confident—I predict a near victory for the "positives." The chief reason I have for this hopefulness is the only one I wish to urge—the *moral and logical necessity that it should be so*.

Let us examine these great moments of history which I have pointed out. Their sign and token is always a great hope, effecting a great solidarity. The freeing of the Holy Sepulchre, the expulsion of the English, the reconciliation of all mankind

in fraternity and justice—aims real or illusory, but always *causes*, as we say—causes for action, and in different ages under different names, always the same hope of which humanity will not be deprived. Let it have something to conquer, something for which it must strive mightily, and it will be moral; for it seeks to grow, to be greater than it is. Under the external pretext of a Holy Sepulchre or a Universal Republic it is at bottom agitated only by the need of larger accomplishment. When there is nothing to draw it upward it settles back. To hope I have added solidarity—a sentiment that accompanies every noble movement of the heart. Whoever does good feels himself no longer alone; a high desire becomes naturally the rallying-cry of a host, and is in itself a power of association; and, inversely, no noble association can be formed which does not proclaim a moral creed, inarticulate but binding. We call this by a splendid name—unanimity—that is to say, one soul (*une âme*) among many men.

Clearly, hope and solidarity are renewing themselves in France. It has been our bane since about 1840 to have no high mission either as individuals or as a nation. The will, unemployed, grows impotent; then follows the downfall of everything—dignity, responsibility, justice, love. Under the Second Empire there were some fitful gleams, but after 1870 we were enveloped in a national humiliation, forced to live from day to day without ideals and without hope for the future. Thanks to God, we are no longer thus. I do not mean our position in Europe, improved as it is, but our spreading out into other parts of the globe, is an event of infinite moral significance. What was stagnant has begun to flow; for this reason nothing in literature has been so important as the simple Anglo-French Convention of August 5, 1890, by which a vast empire was allotted to us in Africa, provided that we should go to take it.

It was a hope that was sold to us; not much more, but no less. In view of our total lack of a quest, it would have been almost as well for us if a planet in the skies had been pointed out to us for conquest, could we have taken seriously such a gift. Under certain conditions, the gift is greater as the hope is remoter; and we have now two hundred years of difficulty before us—that is to say, two hundred years of life.

I confess that our nation is not yet moved to its depths by

this, but let a bloody reverse to our armies occur, and volunteers will be in plenty—nay, they are already plenty. So far everything has been done in Africa freely and voluntarily; this is why I point to that far-off country to prove our moral renewing. How many officers have already asked leave to follow Col. Archinard's successor! Blood will be shed, women will murmur barbarous names of which we have not even heard till now, a new legend of suffering will be written, a new chivalry will be born. And consequently, also, the virtues of guardianship, of paternity, in the elder of the two countries thus brought face to face, will be developed.

At our very door we have a great stimulant in the question of Alsace-Lorraine. Our underlying motive is not to regain the territory, although our neighbors affect to believe this; we are not looking to *retake*, but to *deliver*. We regard the question from a higher standpoint than is supposed—as we should regard it, for example, were we Americans. The question of Alsace is for us a school of justice, as the question of Ireland is a school of justice in English society. I know not how or when it will be closed, but in the meantime it is open. I do not believe there will ever be a government in France which will assume to settle it by violence, but neither do I believe that there will be one which will listen to proposals for disarmament before it is settled. So it is always before us, a problem and a hope.

Within the past two years, then, there has been an awakening of the national life, and with it a sure and present hope. The moral and religious life will infallibly awake in turn, for this is the result of solidarity, as I shall try to show, arousing hopes higher and remoter still, and these will in their turn advance by the simple effect of increasing activity; for an ideal of good is progressive. While we follow it it moves forward; it is simply the figurehead fixed to our own prow. The indispensable condition is that we should ourselves be in motion. Thank heaven, that is now true. We have accepted a republic, new laws, new perils to society; we have accepted ourselves, with our stimulating shortcomings. The future is full of menace, but this very menace will force us to seek and to embrace some high and certain help. It has always been so; the day when to act nobly exposes us to persecution is the

day which removes the last doubt as to our action. A thousand undertakings invite us ; never have the words youth, the future, the next century, been so continually on the tongues of men. We begin to see the good aspects of affairs as they assume the shape of duties, and as the hour of trial approaches, uncertainty is at an end. The forward movement is universal.

I have said that solidarity is evolved as hope is renewed. This truth is perhaps the most manifest of all, in our present condition ; it cannot be denied.

There is a growing belief that individualism has had its day, that the pursuit of personal happiness is the root of all evil, and slowly, gradually, we are turning away from it, not without heart-rendings.* Our experience has been a bitter one ; is not our modern pessimism the result of it ? Our profound disenchantment, our fierce renunciation of pleasures or ambitions, our weariness of heart—what are they all but the result of egotism, and wild, always unsatisfied, thirst for happiness ? Asceticism, the root and soul of all great organizations, has reappeared ; the natural effects follow. Wearied of consecration to self, we struggle to lose ourselves in the service of something greater than self as the only possible relief. We band together, we form ourselves into all kinds of associations, to find some reason for living less unsatisfactory than our individual profit. Perhaps never since the establishment of the monastic orders has there been such a fever for associations throughout the world ; everywhere we find co-operative societies, leagues, unions of all sorts, to say nothing of church organizations. Everywhere we have to do with groups rather than with single persons. The motive of this general movement is an immense need of sympathy. On all sides men are seeking companionship. Can I not agree in something with my fellow who chances to pass ? Quick ! all is well. Let us prolong the cordial moment and rejoice in it—we so conjure, for a brief space, at least, the powers of darkness—let us remain to-

* Let us agree on definitions. Individualism has two meanings ; in the sense in which Emerson, Carlyle, Browning, Ibsen, understand it, it is a necessity, and we should seek to develop it in ourselves ; if we look upon the individuality as an instrument, this ought to be strengthened, freed, responsible. But the individual is not his own end ; personal happiness cannot be the object of the universe nor of our own existence. It is in this sense that individualism is a thing of the past.

gether. This is the magnet which draws men close and binds them, and this is the power which makes solidarity a reality. And inversely, as I have said, no group of persons can be held together who do not have this common soul. Egotism is a disintegrating force. Form your leagues for more wages only, or power, or comforts, and though you get what you desire, to-morrow will see you at war among yourselves over the spoils. No association can endure unless it be free from consideration of private advantage ; and this is precisely why association is so fine a thing : it serves as a scale of values in the history of moral ideas.

The vastest association (leaving aside the Church) is that which we have lately formed in France : I mean Democracy. Begun before its time (in 1848), subjected for twenty years to every device of procrastination, it has nevertheless persisted, and we must not only accept but champion its cause, for it is here *de jure* as well as *de facto*. To be sure, it is still in its nonage, nor can it escape from the barbarous tyranny of majorities until it shall have found the formula of an exactly proportional representation. But the advent of Democracy is a circumstance so tremendous in itself that we cannot reason by analogy from the past to the future : the revolution of thought is too radical. I am only sure that the moral ideal will somehow find here its account. M. Charles Secrétan has shown so well the vital necessity of this that I cannot refrain from quoting his own words : " When right and might are one, who shall restrain them ? When it pleases an unlimited power to overturn the barriers it has itself set up, who shall restore them ? Unlimited power is incompatible with the rights of the minority or the individual, but it cannot be curbed by violence : it must submit itself to moral restraints. In Democracy the morality of the greatest number is the only pledge that liberty shall continue to exist. However discouraging this conclusion may be, it is certain that political safety depends wholly upon private effort, upon an inner mission, if we may be allowed to generalize this expression ; in short, upon the individual conversions which men of healthy mind and upright heart may bring about by public exhortation, private discourse and personal example."

Here, then, is a necessity. I aver that, like every need in Nat-

ure, it will receive satisfaction through the Power by which the world exists. That Power knows its own ways. Experience shows that every nation which unifies, solidifies itself, spontaneously produces a religion, which is but the consciousness, whether true or false, of its destiny. Observe what is to-day taking place in the United States, that field of experiment for young communities. Ever since the conclusion of its Civil War, twenty-five years ago, it has been in travail with its ideal. Its self-conceit, which was a kind of youthful enthusiasm and ebullition, will cease for want of nourishment. America is already the starting-point of a vast religious movement, amazing those who watch it. Such is the law of democracies. Ours of Europe, which cannot spread themselves over large spaces, and which everything threatens, are so much the more bound to an energetic *sursum corda*. Unification is not yet complete in France ; it is not yet true that we are one people, from highest to lowest, but we shall be ; it cannot be gainsaid. And who doubts that this sudden fusion will bring with itself a new formula ? All the elements are here, and must of necessity combine, and combination must be accompanied here as everywhere by the disengagement of intense heat. We unite for the sake of something to do, or something to care for. Society, by the act of organization, confirms its ideals. This is why idealism has the future to itself—nay, the immediate future. We are on the eve of a new romantic movement, a new crusade. We may rest assured of the triumphs of the “positives” simply because *it must be so*.

I have designedly put forward but this one argument, which may seem to some nothing but my own ardent desire or my own self will. I repeat, nevertheless, that there can be no stronger one, and that this one is enough. I have, to be sure, mentioned as symptoms of the renaissance of idealism the writings of M. de Vogüé, the “Sagesse” of Paul Verlaine, the “Bois Sacré” of Puvis de Chavannes, the “Beatitudes” of César Franck ; but to a solitary instance another can always be opposed, and our catalogue would be accused of incompleteness. Proofs deduced from mere observation are never of value, above all in our own eyes, since one of our objects is to discredit empirical methods. Besides, the manifestations of idealism, which have to do with the imagination quite as much

as the heart and the will, reach only about thirty thousand of us—only those in whose conscience and life art plays an ennobling part. One in a thousand ! I believe that we ought to rally our forces elsewhere, and that the field of battle should be the great questions of Duty, of the Evolution and the Destiny of Mankind. In this way we leave none behind us or below us. Men of the people, humble, unlettered, thirty-eight millions of Frenchmen, we are all enlisted in this contest. This is the question which we put to our antagonists : Shall modern society be revived ? and can such a renewed society live without positive assertion, without love ? In short, can it live without life ? The response is, beyond a doubt, To live it is necessary to have a soul.

There remains, to be sure, the reply of Royer-Collard : “ Well, let us perish ; that is also a solution.” Why not ? I confess that I have nothing to answer. My conviction as to the regeneration of the soul is that of a man who watches a diver from the bank : he waits with absolute confidence to see him come to the surface here or there, a little nearer or a little farther off ; he needs must reappear without long delay, else he will have gone down forever. And the possibility that all is over with us, no one will admit—no one in his heart of hearts believes.

III.

Once agreed that the hour is at hand when humanity will gather itself together for the advance, we have but to aid in the good work and to welcome in the new day. The future is not a dole to be received, it is a prize to be won. It will be what we shall make it to be ; and to define it clearly, as I am about to try to do, to summon it forth from the place of shadows, is not this to begin to make it already ? When this point is reached, we have only to be steadfast in the supreme joy of creation. This decisive moment of unfolding our design, of marking out an untrodden path, thrills me with a sense of the divine. My hope, proclaimed at last in daylight, has not lost the timid charm of the long years when I cherished it in silence and darkness. To aid each other in rising to a higher life, to better ourselves by working for the good of the whole—surely these are the rallying-cries which sounded in infancy in my ears and those of the men of my time. Long forgotten, our souls

hear again the accents of their mother tongue, and the past mingles sweetly with the future.

Before addressing ourselves to our task, it is imperative to mutually understand one another well, for *I believe in the communion of saints*, and that it should be made manifest. This is an actual necessity, recognized by all who desire that their labor shall not be in vain. In order to meet this need, I am at work upon a series of *Companions of the New Life*, which is to be a concordance of the spiritual movements of our time. A compact must in some wise be formulated between all those who follow, from whatever direction, the path that leads upward.

Since, then, some form of alliance is indispensable, what shall it be? And how shall we declare its object?

The general belief seems to be that we shall inevitably find ourselves engaged in a Catholic propaganda. "Religion alone can regulate thought and action alike," says M. Edouard Rod. "We cannot rest in a sentiment or a theory of religion; we must enroll ourselves in that practical system of worship to which the Church has given a fixed and unalterable form—in the Roman Catholic religion, which is at once a system of morality and of administration. Such, at least, is the logical deduction from the arguments of M. de Vogüé and M. Desjardins." This is clear enough! The restoration and diffusion of the Roman Catholic faith, pure and simple, is our aim, and sooner or later we shall ourselves perceive it! Many people believe this, some to approve it, others to condemn. Every assertion of an ideal on our part they regard, in short, as a conscious or unconscious prologue to a new *Apologia* of the Roman Church.

I think they are mistaken. Our mission is in no degree ecclesiastic. I wish to say this with emphasis, for there would be danger and harm in allowing such a mistake to persist. If it were said that belief in half a dozen dogmas is a necessary preliminary to the accomplishment of our full duty, the impossibility, real or feigned, of such belief would in some minds be a release from the obligations of duty itself, and they would be lost to us by purely speculative differences. This must not be, Christians or non-Christians; as we have common obligations, so must we have a common faith. Truly, I can but smile at the pretence that we can arrive at our ideal—that is to say, our rea-

son for living—only by a long theological or philosophical process. Suppose, for instance, that it were necessary to frame a confession of faith in several articles, and that by one of these articles the Jews, let us say, should be excluded. Would it follow, then, that Jews were incapable of co-operating with us in a movement of reform? Must the “positives” refuse to admit them? What pedantic bigotry is here!

To speak for myself, I should not blush, certainly, to acknowledge for my Master the Christ of the Fathers, nor recoil if my premises should carry me at last to the faith which Pascal owned. But so much the more do I deprecate any shadow of hostility between the disciples of the moral awakening,* even those outside the Christian name, and the Roman Catholic Church. The time is come when we may give ourselves the delicate pleasure of justice in regard to this great power now disarmed; it may even be that an independent efficiency may yet come to us from her by infiltration. I rejoice in all the conquests she has made, and I count them as our own, if they diminish the number of those unhappy mortals who acknowledge neither a destiny nor a duty. It matters little whether we name this destiny the Evolution of Humanity or the Coming of the Kingdom of God. Still less are we concerned whether, in our vocabulary, “duty” becomes the “free development of the personality,” or “obedience to God,” or “following the Saviour.” These are for us, as at bottom they really are, synonyms; are not their visible tokens the same deeds and an equal charity? In a word, our object is far more general than that of the Roman Church, and includes it. We take our position not at any one of the manifold sources of morality and righteous endeavor, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or philosophical, but at the confluence of them all.

So we shall gather in our assemblages persons come to us by all these ways, and they shall be welcome. In being one of us they will not cease to be whatever they already were, and by acts alone they will become of us, without selection and without exclusion except through their own indifference or their own selfishness. They will follow their personal need in religious matters; even the narrowness of the Breton peasant will be respected, and we shall strengthen him in his feeling that the

* “*Le Réveil moral.*”

Host is his stay and sustenance. We have each of us a holy of holies ; who shall dare intrude ?

On such of our beliefs as have no rebound upon society, none has the right to question us—none save the woman to whom we owe our whole being, and the children who owe their being to us. Let us not violate this reserve : too much talk about religion is not a benefit. To the public, to our allies, we need only proclaim the faith we have in common—faith sure and sufficient that we are not living for nothing, and that we have a work to do upon the earth. The possession of an ideal in life, the faith in an ample duty—these are the things which unite us, and these are enough to form us into a brotherhood militant.

The charge is renewed, however : we are told that morality unsupported by defined dogma is always vacillatory ; sooner or later, we are told, it must show its credentials—as, for example, in the will of a personal God, whose full, logical demonstration is insisted on at the outset. In default of this, no decision, no certainty of the need of devotion to the general good. Step by step we are brought to declare our belief in Jehovah, the Decalogue, the miracles, the personal existence of the angels, of the devils, original sin and the holy sacrament (for it is a linked chain), and finally we are told that it is hardly worth while to have made this long circuit merely to arrive at blind credulity !* Thereupon those mocking spirits who are always delighted, I know not why, that nothing should be left standing, say exultingly, “ Look here ! This brand-new Tolstoïsm, this great moral movement that has been dinned into our ears for so long, turns out to be just the good, old-fashioned Catechism ! ” And as they judge, apparently, of the rule of conduct as they do of the elegance of their dress, merely by its novelty, this word “ old-fashioned ” is to them a sufficient expression of contempt and a final condemnation.

Doubtless we ought to be demolished by this attack. Yet the lightness of heart of which I have spoken, which my conviction of a fair future gives, does not forsake me. Nor am I without a rejoinder ; indeed, I can even answer these objectors in three ways, as I invoke authority, experience, or reason.

It cannot be denied that some great men of unquestioned Christianity have not only held a revival of the moral and

* *Foi du charbonnier.*

religious spirit possible, but have predicted it independent of the churches, which seems, especially to the irreligious, a mirage or a chimera. Let us recall the noble discourse of Channing at Philadelphia, May 30, 1841, on the Church Universal, in which he says: "The pure soul moves freely through the whole universe; it belongs to the Church, which is the great family of pure souls throughout the world; nor can any one be shut out from this Church unless of his own will he allows virtue to die within his breast." Let us remember also the lofty declaration of M. Charles Secrétan in the conclusion of "*La Civilisation et la Croyance*:" "The cause we have tried to serve, the moment we have sought to hasten with our vows, is not a return to the past, but the dawn of a new era—that Christianity in spirit and in truth which has always existed in a few souls, but which has never reigned triumphant." When men like these, who would in early days have been the Fathers of the Church, express themselves thus earnestly, they cannot be disregarded and they cannot be set aside except by proofs. Now, it is precisely the proofs of experience that support them; there does exist, in fact, a moral and religious association, with no metaphysical countersign, such as has been declared impossible. Beside the transient organizations for the protection of peace or morals, where we have seen the clergy of various denominations harmoniously working here in Europe, there are established in America at this moment (Christmas, 1891) a Free Religious Association and societies for ethical culture numbering thousands of members, with schools, clubs, asylums, newspapers, and founded on the principle that a religious union of men is impossible on the basis of creed, and must henceforward be formed on the basis of action. I am not sorry, the empiricists, our opponents, being somewhat fuddled with facts, to offer them this hard fact, to which they can only oppose airy speculations as to the difference of race or surroundings—in brief, a frail ideology. There is no reason, truly, why we should not accomplish here, with a few distinctions easy to indicate, exactly what America has already done.

But, once again, the best argument in favor of a "positive" league, unhampered by any religious profession, is its own inward necessity. In the five or six years since the disquiet of our conscience has revealed itself as a problem to be solved,

and since the problem has become pressing and painful, we have seen, one after another, the ghosts of bygone answers raised and laid again: neo-Catholicism, neo-Protestantism, neo-Mysticism, neo-Buddhism. Equally useless all. I have not been surprised. All these solutions seek to reach the heart and will by the intermediary of the intelligence or the imagination: they are all speculative; and metaphysics are not what we must look to. It seems that the answer must be practical, not theoretical; the question is not at first of belief, but of love. Do we ask what we are to believe afterward? Simply what love will have us believe. Here the need will vary according to the disposition—imaginative or logical, timid or bold, scholarly or simple—so that no right shall be disregarded; as many forms of religion as persons, in reality, with one single duty for us all.

Not only, then, do I not make excuses for the lack of a symbol or any profession of faith, but I boldly applaud it.

Extreme moderation of statement, except as to the employment of life, is intentional on my part, and legitimate. Formulas are great evils; the hidden soul of them, which each puts into them for himself, is all that is important and marks the real dissimilarities as well as the true affinities of men. I am far indeed from wishing to inaugurate a new religion after the manner of the Saint-Simonians, or any other. More than this, it would be distinctly at variance with our principle, and we must combat any such pretension if it were entertained, since—let me say it for the last time—our conviction is that our primordial affair is not to speculate about the universe, but to guide our actions within it. Besides, this position is conformable to justice, which decrees that for an evil to which all men are alike exposed, as the evil of disbelief, there must be a remedy within the reach of all men alike—*la bonne volonté*.

Our object is quite distinct, therefore, from that of the established religions, and larger. Religions aim at personal edification by expounding the mysteries of life and death. We propose a common peace and amelioration by the development of the loving will. On this side, then, our position is sufficiently clear and defined.

But it will be objected that we are confounding ourselves with the hundreds of charitable organizations which already

exist. Is philanthropy the sole purpose of the "positives"?

Not so, I answer. We are distinct from those generous associations formed for special ends; but here, again, as in the case of the churches, I would say that we include them. In the same way we claim them for ours when they possess and communicate a soul; only, while with the creeds our position is at the point of confluence, here it is at a common source. Our faith in duty and in destiny forms a reservoir whence the heroes of philanthropy may draw their strength, or, in possible disaster, their consolation.

One other characteristic distinguishes us widely from charitable organizations. If philanthropy consists in so doing that comfort is greater and suffering less widespread, then we are not philanthropists. In charity so understood there is something at variance with our underlying principle. *Common amelioration* is what we stand for, not a good wage and a good dinner to the poor. On this point our position is so clearly put in some weighty lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning that I transcribe them:

" 'Tis impossible
To get at men excepting through their souls;
And poets get directlier at the soul
Than any of your economists; for which
You must not overlook the poet's work
When scheming for the world's necessities.
The soul's the way. Not even Christ himself
Can save man else than as he holds man's soul.
Take the soul
And so possess the whole man, body and soul.
What we are imports us more
Than what we eat; and life
Develops from within." *

Yes; life develops from within, and within we must seek it, if we wish to ameliorate it. To dream of *doing good* to some one is as vain as to believe that we have changed a wild thorn into a rose-tree by tying a rose to the tip of every branch; the roses fade and fall, the thorn remains what it was before. That good may grow, it must be sown in the very heart of the people and in our own heart also. Thus, our work will be different from that of all the charitable enterprises, which are, I agree, needful in a democracy regulated by law; they are, moreover, an excellent means of moral culture for those who

* "Aurora Leigh."

engage in them. But our object is different: we study our sufferings, and those of our brothers, in their origin, in the germ, and we address ourselves to the will. We are not fighting evils, but Evil.

Here, then, equally definite on this side, is the field of action where we are to agree and to co-operate. It is by souls upon souls that we must act, in proportion as they are capable of loving goodness and of struggling for it through everything.

It remains to speak of our guiding principle and practical methods.

As to our principle. I have already enlarged upon it; I am so imbued with it that I am sure it can be felt through everything that I say. It is the reconciliation of the conscience with the higher life. Leaving aside all question of agreement on any theoretic truth, we seek to arrive at faith through obedience to duty. The ideal of humanity—by the name of God or any other that you choose—is for us an object of desire and will before being an object of knowledge: on this point we have no shadow of doubt. All of us, Christians and non-Christians, know that there is a task before humanity, and we set about it; we are sure of reaching our end by well-doing.

Nevertheless, well-doing, as it is understood by the society of the present, is not what we have in mind, for it contradicts our elementary principle. We understand as the true good, for ourselves and for the community, moral force, strenuous endeavor, true deserving. And in spite of this we range ourselves—the best among us—under the system of almsgiving. Charity is still conceived of as in the time of Queen Bertha, who was, according to the old chroniclers, “a pious dame and right good almoner.” This feudal system of right action, almsgiving, presupposes always an active and a passive: a suzerain and vassals; serfs, rather, not yet grown so far toward manhood as to recognize other happiness than the animal joys of warmth, food and largesse. One saves one’s self assuredly by works of pity, and afterward humanity does as best it can. It is as if we said to the poor, “My own idea of a good life, which I realize in loading you with benefits, is out of your reach; apparently you exist to give employment to my warm heart, to procure for me pure sensations of virtue, endeavor, endurance, purification of nature by sacrifice. Leave all this to me.

These are indeed good things, but you poor are too much crushed under the burden of your necessities to comprehend them; leave me to develop my morality at the expense of yours." Strange inconsistency in the application of a rule of life, which, nevertheless, controls us still! Charitable associations on every hand distribute alms of bread, coal, clothing; schools and colleges are establishments of intellectual almsgiving, where children—thanks, perhaps, to a sacrifice on their parents' part, not on their own—listlessly receive from a teacher truths which they do not enjoy because they have not earned them. Mental charity is also doled out by the polytechnic institutions, Young Republican and Young France unions, which organize gratuitous distribution of knowledge to suspicious workingmen who distrust the too-great readiness of the proffered gift. Everywhere we see the active and the passive elements; in brief, the eleemosynary system. In the neighboring field of religion and morals it is still the same: sermons, missions, all the various devices of conversion by authority, are forms of moral almsgiving. But here the error goes further, even to the seizure of consciences in order to bestow upon them an ideal which we ourselves find good. This may entail fearful consequences. The tyrannous theocracy of Geneva, the Inquisition, and Torquemada's well-intentioned crimes, are the logical outcome of this false conception of moral charity. The fanatics of the past assuredly meant to do good to a passive humanity—they did not understand that a Paradise not chosen, not desired, not freely gained, may perchance be a hell. Their progression was speculative, from faith to act, inversely to our movement and our principle.

The eleemosynary method is neither sure nor unequivocally good. He who gives bread to a tramp gives perhaps the strength to be employed in committing a crime for which he will be executed, and thus perhaps the giver gives death. He who teaches the tramp to read and to write makes him, it may be, capable of greater wickedness, of unheard-of crime, and thus again, perhaps, gives death. There are too many such chances to allow us to adopt almsgiving as a general principle. There cannot be a law of good with so large an admixture of uncertainty. On the other hand, he surely gives in charity to the unhappy who rectifies their ideal of living and teaches them

to love that ideal. The weakling whose will is thus amended learns to place his well-being in well-doing, in patience and achievement; he will be as well taught as the man whom you would teach, but of his own effort; he will escape from misery as easily as the man whom you would support, and, having at the same time preserved his dignity, feel himself co-operating in a grand work and becoming more manly.

If we reflect on this subject, we are not surprised that so much kindness in the world should have been expended to pure loss; that all these benevolent enterprises should have answered so ill the hopes of their promoters, and that, in spite of having done so much for the people, the so-called "social question" should be more threatening than ever. We believe that the rôle of little providences superintending an inert multitude is no longer suited to the age, and that the idea of duty must be made clear and manifest, and communicated to all men. Our own goodness is dear to us, but that of the whole is dearer. We do not attach extreme importance to being personally saved, if humanity is lost. We mean to share this ideal of which we are possessed with as many men as possible; we wish to make them attain to it by their own efforts—by the *via dolorosa*, which is still the only way.

The economists have taught us the nullity of practical results from almsgiving. It does not enrich the community by a penny-worth, being but an inconsiderable displacement of money; it impoverishes, rather, because it defers, in a certain number of persons, the necessity of work. The moral results are no better: it is only a little displacement of selfishness without diminishing the whole amount in the community; rather increasing it, because in some the ardor of asking and of taking grows faster than the ardor of giving in others. As the economists have for object the total wealth of society, let us be concerned with its total morality—let us endeavor to augment that. Since egotism is the destructive element, it must be made to disappear, not from our own life alone, but from all other lives. And if we are told that sacrifice must have an object, and that it consequently will generate selfishness in turn by a sort of inevitable see-saw, we reply that this is precisely where we triumph. Since to devote ourselves to persons, as to children, the poor or the sick, is to waste the force that should be di-

rected to the morality of the whole, and since, being human, we must devote ourselves to something, it follows that our only outlet is to devote ourselves to the realization of an ideal good. We must possess such an ideal, then, and it must be clear and compelling ; we must look beyond the individual, if we would not vainly expend our life. The common ideal according to which we live—this is the true social wealth. To increase this store, while sharing it at the same time with those who are in need, we may follow the lead of the economists and introduce into the government of conscience the two fruitful principles of the new charity—assistance by means of employment and mutual aid. Now, to give employment to poor souls is to give them an ideal, a duty ; it is to charge them with responsibility, strength-giving burden ; to establish mutual aid for poor souls is to make the example of each the common profit of all. Here is what we have to do. In a word, we must replace almsgiving by awakening.

A fine principle, it may be said ; a beautiful, a divine, task, if only it could be accomplished. Unluckily, it cannot be ; and this is a logical consequence of the principle itself. We can give bread, coal, warm clothing ; we can give instruction in history and mathematics ; but it is a contradiction in terms to ask us to develop from without what can only come from within, and what is only valuable on condition that it is the result of free activity. Let us throw to the winds the wish that humanity may desire its own salvation and find once more delight in its own grandeur, and let us keep silence on our own vantage-ground ; besides, what hold have we on men's wills ?

We are not without a hold. It is certain that we writers who can speak aloud and compel attention are not a chosen few, for all that ; we should give up this wrong notion. I knew a poor woman, a woman of the people, dying of consumption in a garret at Clichy. She had a strange, rude manner of speech, yet her lingering agony only forced from her one single sigh. "Great heavens," she said, "to think that there are people who suffer more than I do now !" The soul of humanity was alive in this poor, wornout body, and we must confess that this woman realized what is our destiny better than we ourselves. Yet were we not there as depositaries and intermediaries through whom her force shall be transmitted ? I be-

lieve that words, themselves of little value, are a kind of circulating medium by means of which the *power of the will* is diffused throughout the world.

Nor is this all; the will itself is but the bridge from love to action, from desire to deed. We can help to stimulate this desire by unweariedly showing what is best in ourselves and in our possibilities; in displaying an ideal, a far-off Grail, whose wisdom shall haunt the dreams of young men. Poetry, I have already said, is heroism in another key. What a career for us! What ought to be our humility when a mission so glorious is entrusted to us, feeble creatures that we are, and how great should be our exultation at possessing what is the supreme good, according to our doctrine, a greater burden than others, an ampler duty and a beneficent responsibility!

Having our task thus set before us, we may begin upon it in ways which are neither vague nor chimerical, but practical and consistent with our guiding maxim. Let us enumerate them:

1. For two or three years it will be good to limit ourselves to *spreading opinion*, for nothing is more dangerous than enterprises undertaken before they are ripe; our work must be desired and demanded; it must be expected in order to be welcomed.

2. This spread of opinion should have as its first object the undoing of some of the evil which literature has wrought in the last forty years. Sincere minds must be taught that pure dialectics, the study of phenomena as things in themselves, leads only to tautology and stammering, while the world about us remains full of mystery in which we ourselves are plunged, and that skepticism and irony, on the other hand, are only an avowal of incompetency, of which we should be no more proud than of any other mental deficiency. The humblest parish priest who longs to be better than he is, knows more of the essential things of life than the prince of scoffers. It is time to exalt the humble, and to show them that the noise which intimidates them is only the blatant heralding of a nonentity which to-day shall be stripped bare.

3. We must cover with contempt and ridicule the productions of that low-toned literature which attacks weak wills. I believe we can do this by going straight to the question of

small profits, of rapacity, always unpopular in France. Here it will be necessary to set a new fashion.

4. "Philosophize with thy soul," said one of the ancients. We must learn also to judge with the soul, not merely æsthetically, by the pleasure of eye or ear, for this mental separation made by our other faculties is artificial. We must not forget that the most important of all things is *to live*, and that words spoken or written are, in reality, deeds, and as such exalt or depress the rules of conduct to which, we still declare, our action is submitted. We ought not to hesitate to say on any occasion, "This book is good," or "This book is bad." If two or three prominent critics would have the courage of their convictions, this could be done. It is time that these simple and all-important questions should be plainly put, and that we should have them plainly and simply answered. Our judgment needs rectification; our moral sensitiveness has grown rusty from disuse.

5. In demanding that art shall be penetrated by a higher morality and a greater seriousness, I do not ask for the moral commonplaces that fill Sunday-school libraries. Far from that; the reform, as I have said, must begin in hearts, not in books. If I may use a homely image, the moment to season our food is when it is still in the pot, not when we are offering it to our guests at table. There are vulgarity and stupid affectation in pretending to be occupied with morals in literature, whose very first precept is veracity, and where refinement demands that expression do not overstep conviction. The author need not assume the attitude of a preacher; let him but have a lofty soul, and every word he writes will preach for him, unconsciously to himself, with an inborn persuasiveness.

6. A current of communication must be established between all those who profess to believe in duty and who live according to that belief. For this it is necessary that earnest and thoughtful men should know of whatever is going on around them; should follow the debates in the legislatures, and interpose whenever the voice of justice needs to be heard there; should inform themselves of practical heroism, and recognize the efforts which private initiative is making in Africa and in every spot where men are fighting for an ideal; should direct schemes for social improvement, should grasp in fellowship the

rough hands of workmen. It is essential, too, that these latter should know that we are with them, and that our heroes should feel themselves upheld by a very strong sympathy, so that, far away on the banks of the Niger or the Oubanghi, they may be strengthened by the consciousness that their allies here are also working to give humanity reasons for living. Lectures, conferences, publications, will all be useful in making manifest this solidarity and in strengthening it.

7. It will be well that our doctrine of simple affirmation of righteousness—as simple and as old as mankind itself—should be everywhere plainly set forth. From the distinguished young men whom I know I look for the development of this vital truth. Starting from the grand words of Pascal that “the will is one of the principal organs of faith,” supported by Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason,” they will reiterate the truth that only the good life clears up the doubts of the mind; that faith is purely and simply our consciousness of moral growth, and gradual as that growth itself, and *the reward of it*. They will prove to us that the impossibility of formulating our belief, far from being a discouragement, is our chief glory; since it would be immoral if faith could be formulated and put into words, so that to know how to read would be sufficient to enable us to possess it, and to be ignorant of reading would be enough to deprive us of it. Faith is incommunicable, and must be so, like the moral growth whence it emanates.

8. A kindred task to this (although more individual), and one which I equally recommend to young students of good will, is what I call the elaboration of an interior Christianity. I mean by this a work which shall show in the facts of intimate, contemporaneous daily experience the same spiritual phenomena which Christianity has at all times recognized under the names of sin, mortal sin, redemption, grace, the results of asceticism, of prayer, illumination by the Holy Ghost, blessedness of renunciation, hidden peace, etc., etc. We should reconstruct thus a sort of interior Christ where every noble soul would recognize his own experience.

The fortunate results of such exertions would be twofold. To Christians it would bring a renewal and revivification of their faith, making it actual to them, showing it alive beneath the dead stubble of the letter; to non-Christians it would be

an enormous help in making them understand their Christian fellow-workers from within, and in giving to themselves the advantage of eighteen centuries of an admirable moral experience. Besides, my hope is obstinate—a beginning of unanimity would be made between them.

Such, as well as I can see and interpret them, are the various directions in which the movement of opinion will spread during the preliminary period of the awakening. But during this time practical reforms should not be forgotten. They should go hand in hand with the other.

We are forbidden by our principles to believe that much can be effected by constraint or civil laws. An impassioned poet or a man of fervid faith will forever be of more use than a hundred timid deputies. But it may be well to become a part of the political organization for the sake of guiding and restraining it.

9. We are working, then, in the drift of liberal democracy, we are protesting against the fatal effects of the principle of almsgiving. We shall combat Protection and every form of State socialism; logically we can do nothing else, since to believe in the moral law is to assert the necessity of the largest liberty and the benefit of responsibility. It is easy to see how these propositions reciprocally depend on each other and stand or fall together. As to the founding and establishment of new colonies, or anything else, we claim that chartered companies, religious missions and private enterprises should all have a fair field, should indeed be encouraged and stimulated to exertion. We shall try to prevent the State from assuming the risks, the rewards, the energy in action, which are the portion of the individual. We hold in abhorrence the troop of slaves which is the dream of the self-deluding State socialist or anarchist dazzled by a specious appearance of justice.

10. Our principles lead us also to endeavor that the army, the universal school of our people, shall not be a school of automatic action and depression of individuality, as is falsely declared it must be for the sake of discipline.

Discipline is indeed necessary, but the ideal discipline is that which should be the result of a single will throughout the whole, instead of the extinction of the will-power; an extinction which is an injury to all civil society, since every year some

of the released soldiers return to its midst. For such a discipline a profound moral reform in the corps of officers is indispensable ; they should be really the elect of the land, ripe in experience and penetrated with the love of their profession, even more than any other of the teachers of our youth. They should love the men for the sake of the good whose humble instruments they may become ; they should delight in giving their lives to forming them. In the military schools of Saint-Cyr, Saint-Maixent, Saumur and Fontainebleau, then, the moral awakening should begin ; here are the first beacons to be fired.

11. We are bound also to aid public instruction in its attempts at reform, although we can but provisionally approve of State instruction. We must encourage it to stimulate activity everywhere, to arouse its professors to their responsibilities, and to make them organize. Happy will it be for us when they shall cease to drag the Napoleonic chain. We should be glad to see the intellectual tyranny of Paris shaken by the creation of great university centers throughout the provinces, so that more and more men, professors in them, should risk themselves upon the dangerous but luminous peaks of free and full intellectual life.

12. We are also bound to demand every guaranty and all respect for voluntary associations which do not threaten the State—that is, do not pretend to equal functions. The famous right of association imposes itself on the anxious consideration of every one who is engaged in the moral awakening. The reason is obvious. To give but a hint of my meaning, it will be understood that the mutual independence of Church and State, however legitimate and necessary it may seem to the upright conscience, can only be undertaken when the ulterior freedom of each power is guaranteed not only by legislative measures, but by a firm conception of justice in the minds and dealings of men. We must respect and regard rights of association outside our own.

13. Toward the laboring classes, who live from day to day by manual toil, and on whom we feel our future to depend, we must pursue a different policy from that of the present. My own experience among the workingmen of Paris has convinced me that they can only be helped in the things where they help themselves ; what is done for them will always be

listlessly, indifferently, received. This observation is perfectly in accord with our doctrine of moral awakening.

When the various coal companies have heaped all kinds of charities on their miners—nurseries, hospitals, schools, libraries—and are amazed to find that after all these inducements the Grève* is still thronged, we are forced to understand that the miners would only have valued these good things if they had won them for themselves, like men, by the expenditure of their own effort. To hold men quit of endeavor is to plunge them back into animality and to give them over to their passions.

I believe that the moral method is possible; we ought to know humanly, personally, those whom we wish to help. Why not say to the organizers of a co-operative store, for example: "Why don't you start a mental co-operative society? Subscribe together to papers and reviews, have a library as the clubs do, have patterns of clothing in a room where your wives may meet in the evenings to sew, by light furnished at the common expense; if one of you has learned anything which he wants to tell his comrades, let him tell it; or if you want to hear one of the famous lecturers, get him to come to you. Our friends are ready to go to you—not for nothing, certainly, nor as a charity, but for a fee, so that what they have to say, paid for by sacrifices on your part, may seem valuable to you." Only thus can the true People's Palace, of which we hear so much, be founded or prosper. For the same reason we must support the principle of profit-sharing—impossible to regulate by law for lack of a sure control, but practicable to benevolence and justice.

This principle is good not merely because it is equitable, but because it bestows on the poor the noble dangers of responsibility, transforming them from beasts of burden into men.

There may be more reforms, which do not occur to me at the moment, to be proposed and carried out in the same spirit, which is broad enough for them all. But I have already said enough to show that it is not the imagination but the will itself that we wish to deal with. Since our faith is like a sunrise behind a steep hill which we must climb before we can see, let us begin our ascent; since it is our general affirmation that right

* Public square in Paris (near the Hôtel de Ville) where workmen out of employment station themselves,

action is of the first importance, let us decide upon some definite good act. Our ideas are in order and our plan is clear.

I have as yet spoken only of the preparatory period, which should occupy the next two or three years. It is probable that the idea will take shape of itself after that (and *of itself* it must be, or we contradict ourselves), and we shall probably see a moral-aid society, like those societies of New York, Philadelphia and London, embody itself in France by spontaneous aggregation. This will be the beginning of a second period, militant still, but more expansive.

What this society will do I am neither able nor worthy to indicate. Moreover, it is not yet time. I only wish that it may be very austere, its action only arising from its moral force, and its prestige more important than its numbers. It ought to be very difficult to enter it, and very easy to lose the right of membership. Fifty men acting in harmony, full of energy and conviction, would be enough.

This society will have its organ, where we shall always hear the voice of justice, the incorruptible champion of good. Since it will be recognized as a civil unit, it will receive legacies and donations which at present go largely to charitable works or to academies for lack of a better object, and it can lay secure foundations for itself in the manner of its elder sister societies in America.

Divided into as many sections as there are fields for the exercise of moral energy, it will have its orators and writers ; it will watch over the standard of books in primary schools, urge the formation of clubs and guilds, encourage missionaries and explorers, popularize their efforts and proclaim their triumphs, even in failure or in death ; everywhere it will attack immorality and inertia, which is immorality known by its true name. In accordance with its name and its guiding maxim, it will give that moral aid nowhere to be found as yet ; that is to say, for the sick and infirm of will, about whom society does not concern itself, it will open hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, retreats for all the obscure maladies with which our time is afflicted ; it will assign saving tasks and missions to those contorted and crippled souls, persuaded that endeavor alone bestows peace and reintegrates man in his true nature.

In times of public catastrophe or sudden physical calamities,

a brigade of the unhappy and unbalanced will be hurried to the place of suffering to give their aid there ; a mutuality of helpfulness will be established, and the really assisted, the truly saved, will be those who went to do what they could.

And finally, to secure such an organization of men interpenetrated with one and the same discipline, it will be necessary to have an actual moral seminary, a school of liberty, as we may call it, where young people of promise will be admitted at an early age—a school whose object it will be to prepare youth for all duties of life, and to form character, which is too often lacking in a liberal democracy. Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Paul, Augustine, will doubtless count for more than Cicero in such a school ; contrary to the custom even of Jesuit seminaries, and the direct experience of mutual dependence, strenuous and virtuous life will count for even more than they. There will be no hesitation in teaching pupils present history ; they will be made to balance the advantages and disadvantages of social and solitary life ; the subjects of women and marriage will be frankly dealt with ; they will be taught how to honor a wife and how to perform the duties of a husband and father. They will study living humanity by being brought into contact with the humblest classes ; for the custom will arise of sending our sons, not on a tour to Italy or the East, but to some poor tenement in Ménilmontant or Montrouge, to serve a three months' apprenticeship to life.

The acquisition of each new fact will be its own recompense, and must be striven for as our doctrine demands. We shall recruit from the vanishing middle class an *élite* who will communicate to our successors the best that was in us, following the example of the part played in the beginning of our *bourgeois* age by liberal and earnest nobles like de Tocqueville, Broglie, d'Haussonville, Agénor de Gasparin.

I must stop. *O quanto è corto il dire!* How inadequate are words to describe what the eyes of desire already plainly see ! It is best to keep silence as to the precise details of our plans. We must respect the mystery of the future. Our reflections have convinced us that it unveils itself little by little, slowly, and only to those who evoke it by the conduct of their life. The time will come when these schemes, which seem vast and chimerical to the nonchalant onlookers of to-day, will appear

slight and insufficient to the actors of to-morrow. Once again, let us respect the mystery of our future creation ; let us not seek too eagerly to know, for knowledge without action is our great temptation. Let us concern ourselves only with being men of *good will*.

Our present attitude is that of good men whose desire is great, but who feel themselves too weak to realize it. Neither can we renounce it ; and we send out a passionate cry for help. This attitude is perfectly well known ; it has a name ; it is Prayer. Let us repeat, then, with all our strength, the Christian petition, "Thy kingdom come !" Only, instead of murmuring these words upon our knees, with eyes raised to heaven, let us say them standing on our feet, and as a command to ourselves. The help we implore has been given to us ; it is, first, the consciousness of our destiny, and, next, the deep conviction that the work of saints and heroes, during so many centuries of agonized struggle, to uplift man from brute, cannot have been a vain expenditure.

It would not be just to accuse us of over-confidence. We do not trust in our strength, but in the power of evolution which is inherent in mankind. We have no personal pride : we desire to begin simply ; we know that nothing great can be built except on a foundation of humility and self-forgetfulness. It is possible, it is even probable, that we shall never see our heart's desire ; but it matters not : others will come after us who shall see it in a fullness which we cannot imagine. This is the thought that cheers us onward ; this is the secret comfort of all true lovers who desire that the object of their love shall be made happy, even if it is not by themselves. And if you have listened to us ever so little, you will concede that what actuates us is really love itself.

THE CONSERVATOR

THE CONSERVATOR is not the organ of the Ethical Movement, as known in America and Europe, but is published in its interest. It is an exponent of the world-movement in Ethics, and of that movement as specially reflected in Ethical societies.

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The Board, therefore, again wishes to call the attention of the members to a monthly, appearing under the editorship of the Secretary of our sister Society in Philadelphia, under the name of THE CONSERVATOR. Although this monthly is not an organ of the Societies, and is not under their absolute control, it yet appeals to our sympathies, and may justly claim our active support and assistance. The monthly reports about the Society, from the pen of one of our members, are intended to keep the members and the public informed of the occurrences in the Society, and may also be effectually utilized in our Ethical propaganda. The price of subscription is very small, and probably within the reach of almost every member.—FROM THE LAST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE.

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